

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 000

CS 006 522

AUTHOR Santiago, Isaura Santiago; And Others
TITLE Multicultural Approaches to Word Decoding and Vocabulary Development: Learning to Read in the Content Areas in the U. S. A.
PUB DATE 17 Dec 81
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Language Problems and Public Policy (Cancun, Mexico, December 16-19, 1981).
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education; Bilingual Students; *Content Area Reading; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Pluralism; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); *Language Acquisition; Learning Theories; Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; Semantics; *Vocabulary Development

ABSTRACT

Questioning the process by which language minority students are taught literacy in the United States, this paper argues that language skills, including reading, should not be taught in isolation, and that learning, not literacy, should be the guiding force for educators. The paper first discusses the special reading problems of the language minority students. It then reviews several traditional methods (and their limitations) of introducing such students to the basic English reading vocabulary--phonics, whole word approach, visual/motor approach, visual approach, and auditory approach. The paper next proposes that bilingual students learning to read in English in mixed language groups might benefit from a multicultural reading approach that allows them ample opportunity to perceive and conceptualize aspects of the language by using a dynamic, interdisciplinary model that includes a sequential, spiraled, cumulative approach. The paper also provides suggestions for teaching methods, materials, and enrichment activities for use with this model. (FL)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

MULTICULTURAL APPROACHES TO WORD DECODING
AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT: LEARNING TO
READ IN THE CONTENT AREAS IN THE U.S.A.

Isaura Santiago Santiago, Ph.D.

Jo-Ann Sainz, Ph.D.

Bilingual Program
Department of Languages and Literature
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York

Sister Maria Goretti Biggins, Ph.D. Cand.
Division of Administration, Policy and
Urban Education
Fordham University
New York, New York

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jo-Ann Sainz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper delivered at the International Conference on Language Problems
and Public Policy, Cancun, Mexico, December 17, 1981

Introduction

This paper argues that there is significant activity today, international in scope, in the area of reading in first and second (and quite often third) languages. In many cases, this has been the result of minority language groups within ethnolinguistically complex societies demanding access to education and, frequently, the demand for the use of vernacular in instruction. While significant progress towards this end has been made in many countries, much needs to be done. This is true in technologically advanced nations of the world as well as developing nations. The United States is no exception.

The United States shares with a few other ethnolinguistically complex nations a national policy that allows the use of the vernacular as a transitional tool while the main goal remains the acquisition of English, the national language. This paper does not seek to raise questions about this policy; it will be addressed by others here. Nor will this paper address the question of education in the vernacular; that will also be the substance of much discussion today. This paper will address an issue that has been given too little attention--that is, the question of the context and the process by which we teach literacy in the national language. The central theme is that language (reading or any other skill) should not be taught in isolation of content: learning, not literacy, should be the force that drives us.

Nations in the process of developing instructional programs for language-minority children heretofore excluded from educa-

tional services have too often failed to raise and answer central questions related to why we educate language-minority children; what is to be taught; and for what purpose are we educating. This has resulted in unexpected setbacks in countries throughout the world, as discussed in a current United Nations report, Learning to Be (Faure, et al, 1972). Literacy movements in many of the Third World nations have come under much criticism because of unsuccessful attempts to "transfer" curricula and materials from the West, because of the mass exodus of rural peoples to urban areas that has too often accompanied literacy efforts, and because of the frustration suffered by those involved in unsuccessful efforts and by those attempting to reconcile socially and culturally unresponsive curricula.

The "language overdose"

This paper argues that in the United States for language-minority children, the addition of another language in the school curriculum, while quite appropriate and well intentioned, has unnecessarily resulted in what can be termed a "language overdose." Prior to the bilingual education movement in the United States, concern was widely expressed about the overemphasis on reading in schools. Reading scores for over a decade have, in fact, been essentially our only criterion for assessing the ability of a child or the success of a school system. Many shared concerns that our schools were becoming schools of reading. Today, curricula approaches for teaching vernacular and national languages suffer from this same tendency.

That is, the majority of the school day is dedicated to isolated language instruction, rather than learning. The major concern expressed here is that content area instruction is too often given a low priority, or is not learning, or is not dealt with at all in this over-zealousness to develop language skills in two languages.

In the United States, as is the practice in many other countries, the vernacular language is used as a transitional tool, and consequently continues to carry with it the connotation that it is "less than" the majority or national language, and often serves to maintain or increase social or cross-cultural conflict among speakers of different languages or language varieties. There has been much insistence on subject-area instruction in the vernacular language, but there is no evidence as to what extent this takes place, if at all.

When schools become language mills, we lose sight of the major role of school, that is, learning and preparation for living. In fact, a consequence of this "language overdoes" may very well be that students are "turned off" to language, reading, and learning in general. What is proposed here, with special application for educational practice in the United States, is a refocus on learning through a content-centered multicultural approach, which allows for the dynamic interaction that should occur in a multicultural setting. Specifically, what is presented here is a multicultural/content area approach for word decoding and vocabulary development in English for children of the same or mixed language backgrounds who are learning to read in English. After reviewing the limitations of traditional approaches,

a new approach is proposed.

Reading Problems for the Bilingual Child

Some difficulties faced by children from different language backgrounds include the absence of corresponding sound equivalents in the minority languages that are present in the English language; lack of knowledge of English vocabulary; and lack of knowledge of word function. The importance of the learner's acquisition of basic language concepts such as the understanding that writing is a code for speech and that English words have certain basic structures are insights that linguists have contributed. This discovery can augment the structural approach of a good reading series. If children come to a bilingual setting not literate in any language, they must acquire these concepts. Hence, there is a need for many more activities in English that will bring the unknown elements previously mentioned to a level of awareness.

It is during the period of introduction to reading that the bilingual student encounters most difficulty. Many students have great difficulty in sound discrimination. It may be that pupils who experience difficulty do not know the auditory patterns they are expected to know in order to read the material that has been selected for them to read. Contributors to success in learning to read include oral language, visual discrimination ability, and auditory discrimination ability. If the student can hear differences between letter sounds and learn common sounds that letters represent he or she may be able to employ these sounds in word recognition.

The ability to understand spoken English demonstrates that the student has the concrete experiences and perceptual abilities to comprehend words and sentences, the basis for all later communication abilities, including speaking, reading, and writing. Listening requires the perception of separate sounds in spoken words, the very same sounds which are found in written words. If the student can hear differences between letter sounds and learn that these sounds are represented by letters, he or she may employ these sounds in word recognition. With these basic skills, the student may blend the letter sounds into a facsimile of the word. If the word is then familiar auditorially, the student may recognize it and comprehend its significance in its setting (Spache, 1973).

Traditional Methods of Introducing Basic Reading Vocabulary

Phonics. Phonics instruction has as its goal teaching students how to figure out the pronunciation of unfamiliar written words by using the relationship that exists between phonemes and graphemes. The beginning reader who has a rather good command of the oral language, but little or no command of the written symbols of that oral language, must be led from the known to the unknown and from the sound to the written symbol that represents that sound.

The teaching of phonics may begin, it is suggested, when the student has the ability to understand words, ideas, and relationships, when the student has the skill to use words and ideas in oral communication, and when the student has the proficiency to develop new words and ideas based upon prior

learning experiences.

Students first observe their own speech sounds and those of others and then learn that these speech sounds may be represented by letters combined to form words. Phonics is already a part of the student's listening and speaking vocabulary. This is demonstrated by the student's ability to distinguish between words that are made up of sounds. The teacher, for instance, may ask a student to complete a series of instructions. Even though the student would not be able to carry out the instructions if seen on the printed page, the student would be able to respond to spoken directions. This demonstrates that the student has oral-aural proficiency, but not necessarily reading-writing proficiency. The task of the teacher is to use the language in the student's oral-aural vocabulary and then transfer this knowledge to reading and writing levels. In learning to read, the student establishes phoneme-grapheme relationships, the relation of spoken sounds to sounds in print. Sounds in isolation have no meaning. Blended together in the word they represent, however, they must stir comprehension in the mind of the learner or the word will continue to remain meaningless to him. In reading, there are two major kinds of associations the student must learn to make: one is the association between the printed words and the spoken words, i.e., the student must see a word and say it; the other is the association between letters and phonemes, single sounds, i.e., the student must see a letter and say a sound.

Limitations of phonics. Since phonics does not offer help with meanings, it is productive only with words already known in their spoken form (Durkin, 1972). Some problems involved in the use of phonics are seen with pupils who can recognize the initial sound of a word, but then guess the rest of the word. Some students may be confused by the manner in which different sound-symbol relationships in words have similar sounds, as in all, paw, caught; gate, gait; cat, key; scare, skate, school. Also, consonants c and g have two different sounds as in get and gem; cat and cent.

Phonics mastery is a very slow process if repeated with every word. It makes the assumption that the student knows phoneme-grapheme correspondences of the language well enough to easily decode. There is a fallacy also in assuming that the student has the necessary conceptual framework for assimilating foreign sounds by too few and nontangential experiences set up in a classroom situation.

Whole word Approach. One conventional approach to teaching reading has been a "sight" or visual approach. The student is shown the printed form of a word and told the spoken word to be associated with it. He is then expected to remember the visual form of the word and its oral counterpart when it is next encountered in reading.

Visual-motor approach. This approach to teaching basic "sight" word vocabulary adds a motor or writing input. The student looks at the word, says it to himself or herself, looks away, and tries to visualize it, then writes it from memory.

After the student has written it, he or she checks his or her writing of the word with the copy studies. This method adds to the visual and auditory input the input coming from the muscular movements involved in writing the word. Such movement input is called kinesthetic input.

Visual Approach. In the visual approach the student says the word and hears the teacher say it. The student is asked to read the word aloud immediately or later in the reading lesson. It has already been pointed out that the poor reader often cannot make fine visual discriminations. The bilingual student has the extra burden of having to code switch the word in his or her native language to its English counterpart, and thus can lose much in his or her power of concentration or meaning in the process. Further study is needed. The study should consist of more than repeated attempts to read the words flashed at the student. Outside study of the problem faced by the student in this situation should concern itself with operating interfering stimuli.

Limitations to Whole Word Approach. Such a procedure tests the student's automatic response, but does not teach the word if the student fails to recognize it. If the student has trouble with visual memory, the first day he or she might be presented with five words that he or she is required to remember as "sight" words and the next day five more to be added to the ones not yet mastered. This compounding of memory load upon memory load soon leaves the student who has not mastered the desired number of "sight" words with an insurmountable burden.

Basic sight words are often basic to the story and usually to later stories. These are words the student has not yet been taught to analyze independently so they are taught as whole words, a memory load. At the earliest levels, most words are basic; therefore, trouble at this stage is detrimental to the mastery of the reading skill.

If a student has visual discrimination or visual memory problems, a visual approach to learning to read is probably not an appropriate approach for him.

Auditory approach. If the student has good auditory discrimination and memory, an auditory method is likely to be more productive.

The input channels often discussed are the visual, the auditory, and the kinesthetic. Teachers are sometimes advised to find each student's strong channel of input and then find a method of teaching reading employing that channel.

If the response to the printed word does not come within one-half second after the word is seen, it is not automatic enough to help the student read fluently (Flesch, 1955). When a student has to take time to analyze, to search visually, and to think about a word before pronouncing it, this word is not yet in his basic vocabulary, even though he may say it correctly.

Other problems with Whole Word Approach. Whole word recognition skills include, among others, configuration, wherein it is held that the shape of the word should help identify the word, each word having its own configuration or shape. For example, "was" is a word made up of three lower case letters, giving a rectangular shape, but so are the words "saw," "man,"

"ran," "ram," and many others that can be listed, all of which are three-letter-words that give a similar rectangular shape.

Another word attack skill is the ability to recognize "picture" words, words that can cause a mental picture in the mind; for example, "t r e e" can create a mental picture of a tree. But students cannot know if "t r e e" is a picture word until they first recognize the word. Then, of course, there are some words that do not form pictures, such as "what," "the," and "while."

In the skill of "context clues" students are supposed to take an intelligent guess at the word they do not know through knowledge of the words around the unknown word. This presupposes that the words around the unknown word are known. The obvious problem here is that many students do not know the words around the unknown word and so all the words are unknown. In learning "sight" words too much valuable time must be spent on having students memorize words, time that could be spent more profitably in developing and expanding comprehension.

The implication, therefore, is that new kinds of aptitudes should be detected and classified in order to apply appropriate treatment for attaining success in learning to read. Such diverse elements as ethnic background, social class, or educational history must be considered.

Need for New Approach

There is a need for the learner to use real language that is familiar, concrete and spontaneous. Printed letters and words are symbols for sounds that the learner attempts to

associate with meanings. A second fact that stands out is the necessity to improve comprehension, to develop an adequate meaning-vocabulary. Since reading is based on association of meaning with printed symbols, acquiring a rich storehouse of meanings is the first essential in reading readiness, not only in the initial stages but also for the reading of any material at any level. If the learner can verbalize about his experiences, retell stories, identify ideas with appropriate labels, and listen accurately, he can acquire experiences that are linguistically meaningful (Stauffer, 1952). This development is impeded when phonics and other skills to word recognition are treated separately and discretely and then juxtaposed to each other. Also, too often, many insist that reading follow oral development, rather than be parallel to it and simultaneously contribute to the general language store (Heilman, 1972).

Cocking and Copple (1979) affirm Labov's (1970) concerns about current practice. They suggest the need for establishing relevant topics and removing communication barriers by letting the participants know that whatever they say is legitimate, including the use of socially taboo words. Motivation is another area of concern. They recommend that accepting the student's expression of his or her own experience, whatever that is, serves to reinforce self-concept and motivation.

But these are only a few among many experts who have expressed concern about a wide spectrum of aspects of current practice. Psycholinguists, including Clark, Bender, and Stern (1973) have addressed the linguist's view of language as a structured system of signs and the psychologist's understanding

of language as learned behavior, linguistic behavior as conditioning and conditioned by psychological factors, including the speaker's and the hearer's culturally determined categories of expression and comprehension. The sociolinguist, including Rosenblatt (1979), sees the individual reader as evaluating his own personal transaction with the text. Possible evaluative criteria called upon tests the fullness and intensity of the reader's sense of evocation by the complexity of the awareness that is part of the coherent structure the reader must produce, the fidelity to the cues offered by the text and the personal meaningfulness that the reader must evoke.

The Proposed New Approach: A Mixed Group Multicultural Reading Approach

This paper proposed that bilingual students in the United States learning to read in English in mixed language groups may benefit through a multicultural reading approach that allows students ample opportunity to perceive and conceptualize aspects of the English language using a dynamic, interdisciplinary model rather than the static traditional models that have failed pre-literate, bilingual students. In the United States, seventy different language groups are currently involved in the bilingual transitional programs. Yet mostly traditional approaches to teaching literacy have been employed. These have been limited in scope, opaque, and disjointed.

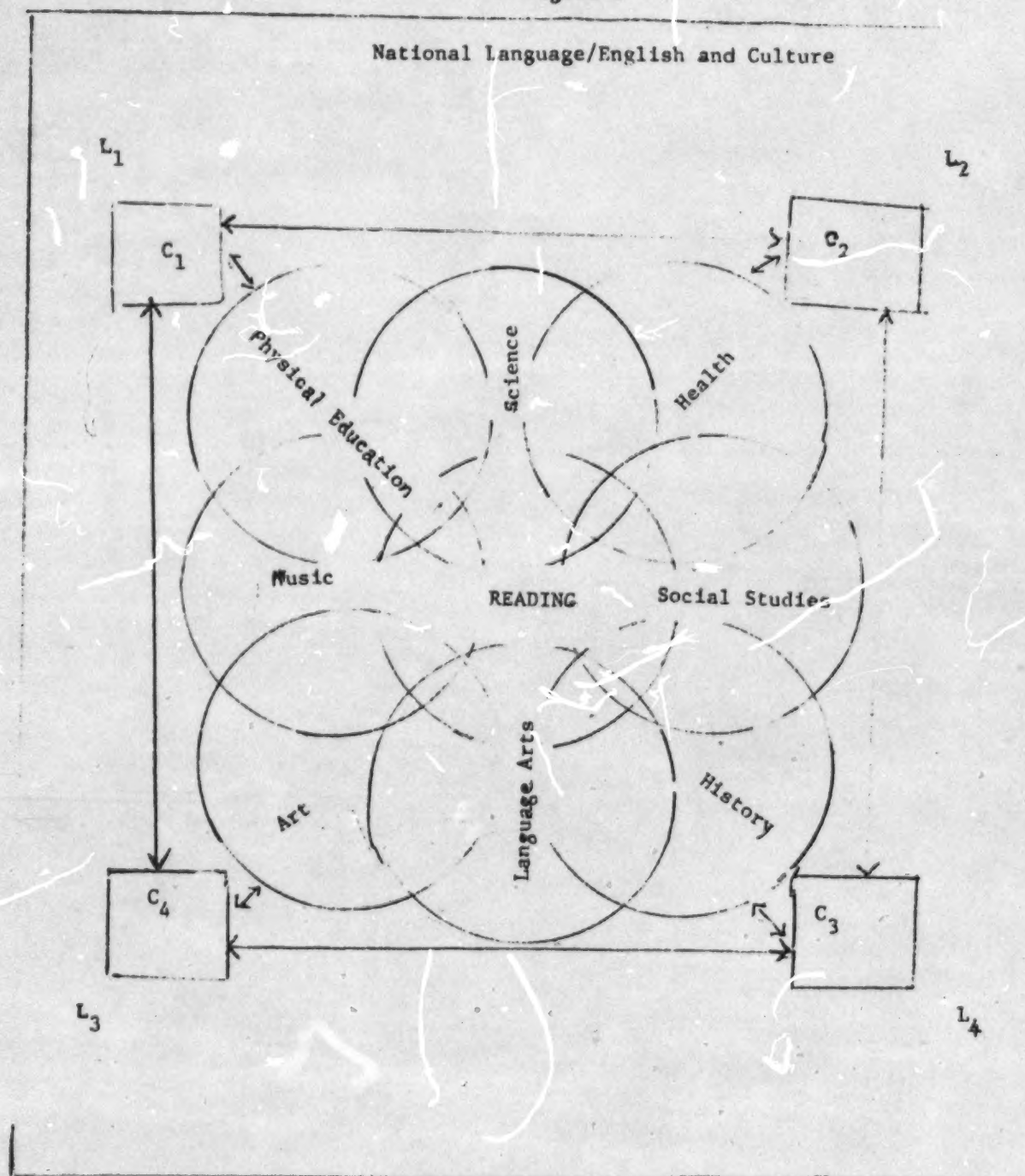
Since education that respects cultural diversity and individual differences must pervade all aspects of individual schooling, its principles and purposes must be comprehensive, penetrating and integrating, not narrow, supplementary, restrictive, or assimilating (Grant, 1977).

This suggests that while the student must be enabled to function in the English-speaking mainstream in which he will one day have to compete, this does not preclude maintaining cultural heritage. The proposed new model accelerates the process of developing the level of proficiency in English in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, enabling the limited English proficiency (LEP) student to be successful across the curriculum in all subject areas.

Characteristics of the model include a sequential, spiraled, cumulative approach, which to be effective must be built on the student's experiences, necessarily multicultural with diverse ethnic groups. It must be interdisciplinary to avoid the "language overdose" effect alluded to previously.

Figure 1 gives a graphic representation of the context in which the proposed program will interact as well as the key elements it addresses.

Figure 1

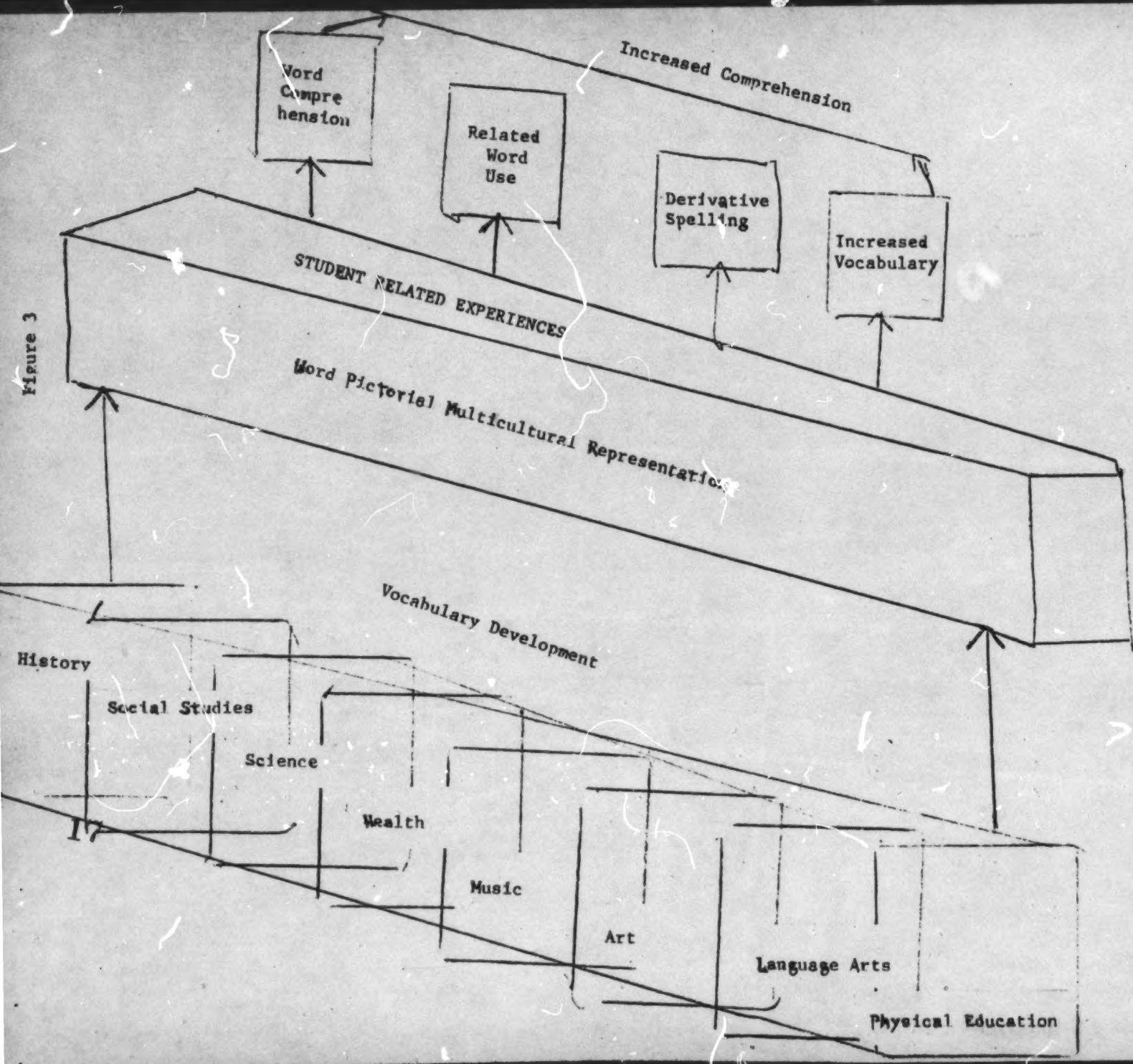


C = Culture: C_1 C_2 C_3 C_4 and so forth

L = Language: L_1 L_2 L_3 L_4

Arrows indicate the dynamic nature of interaction that should occur in treating the disciplines.

Figure 3



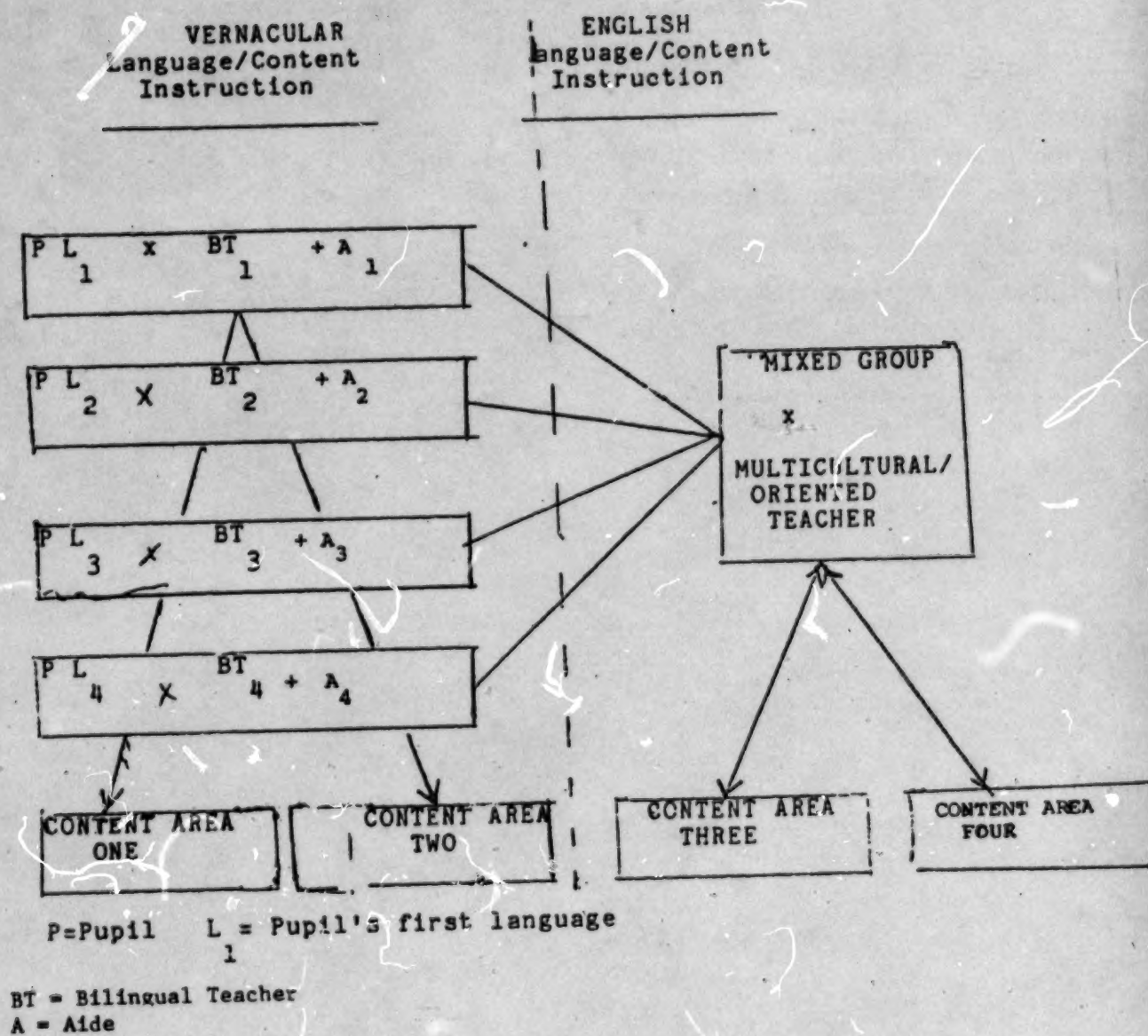
Methods and Materials

There is no reason why the use of common reading materials cannot be the unifying basis for mixed language groups. Not all students in the slower group can master all the new words presented with each story or exercise in the reading materials, but all of them can learn to listen, to think, to discuss, and to create in response to the content of the materials being read. Learners need not be denied exposure to interesting reading materials and to group interaction if the teacher is willing to adapt procedures to fit their needs.

In mixed language groups, native proficiency is not a prerequisite. Learning a language is not merely learning vocabulary. Learning vocabulary without understanding the concepts involved is meaningless. By working with concepts in the second language the student will begin to think in the second language. Being able to think in two languages is a major step toward becoming bilingual. Support systems should be built in to provide allowance for learning the vernacular and then making the transition to a multicultural setting.

This paper focuses on the LEP student who enters the mixed classroom where students of varied linguistic backgrounds now interact. Figure 2 shows how, organizationally, vernacular language bilingual programs can be organized into mixed groups for national (English) language and content instruction.

Figure 2



An essential step, therefore, in teaching comprehension is to determine the words whose meanings should be taught directly, their relation to the previous experiences of the pupils, and what steps need to be taken in developing the understandings needed (Kohi, 1952).

Figure 3 illustrates the process the participant would be engaged in when entering the new language development approach from a language skills perspective. The process ensures the continued consideration of the student's heritage and vernacular language, though this is not graphically indicated. Phonics and linguistic approaches are not to be taught disjointedly or as separate skills, but as a continuous, systematic flow. The student is introduced to the sound-symbol relationships, which he or she is encouraged to develop and make meaningful through enrichment from experiential background. Consonants, consonant clusters, vowels, and vowel combinations are added systematically until all have been introduced and the student has learned how to blend these disparate elements into words with meaning and understanding; he has developed and added to these throughout the whole process.

An example of a stimulus built into the gl consonant structure is GLOBE. A globe is round and represents the earth.

Activity: Ask the students to think about how it is in different parts of the earth. Have them write about a person or family in another place or time. Help them to research information, use learning from their social studies and/or science and then organize their materials into stories. This could be made into books to be placed in the library. People or families in communities in other parts of the world, in history, or in the future are all possibilities.
(ESTRI, p. 10 Sup.)

By use of the word globe as a springboard, parents can be involved and teacher sensitivity and knowledge can be engaged in incorporating experiences of the student. Though we have chosen gl as a consonant blend, any of the other phoneme-grapheme relationships could in like manner be made to serve the multicultural purpose.

Content Area Integration

As suggested here, providing a rich learning experience is essential to language development. To demonstrate how language can be developed through the content area, the concepts inherent in the teaching of the word "globe" are carried through a variety of subject areas in Figure 4 below. This also shows how culture must continue to be considered in designing content and language learning experiences.

Figure 4

Add each of the content areas

Social Studies	Locate country of birth, child's birth or parents.
Health Education	What would you eat for breakfast, lunch, dinner, if you lived there?
Art	Ask parents for pictures. Develop picture file.
Music	What songs, dances, would you lister to? Learn?
Language	Teacher assigns student to interview parents. Hostos, Ponce de Leon, Diaz-National Heroes
Physical Education	Games, Dances
History	Contributions of major figures
Math	How many miles from where student lives to place where parents were born?

Extended Cultural Applications

More locally, students could look for evidences of their culture. At a class outing, students could share experiences and impressions. Hispanic students could point out objects, artifacts in bodegas, botanicas; Haitians might find commonalities; Chinese could give another contribution. Even taking a walk around the block the class is bound to pass ethnic shops. The different items that would be found in the bodega could be named and classified. Any situation could become a multi-cultural learning experience. It is possible to develop a health lesson, a social studies lesson, a science lesson. The bilingual child would thus be encouraged to feel like a participant in the learning process, someone who is accepted, rather

one who is forced to forfeit background, culture, or experiences. Thus, these experiences would contribute to making the class a multicultural reservoir.

Learning Activities

One enrichment activity that might be transformed into a multicultural learning experience in the classroom of the monolingual and bilingual children could be a discussion of modes of transportation, how people travel in the native land of the bilingual student and of the United States. These modes of transportation might be compared and contrasted for types, velocity, and distance travelled. Foods, the diet, vegetation found in different geographic areas could also be discussed. A bilingual student might be encouraged to bring in newspapers read at home, pictures, or items of clothing for comparison and discussion. In a "show and tell" experience, children might share something with their peers that would have cultural import.

All share the same basic human nature and kindred, though not identical experiences. If we take the student in a linguistic vacuum, concentrating only on the mainstream language, we are denying all those rich experiences that preceded him. But if the teacher is sensitive and aware of much that comprises the student's background, the student will be able to contribute aspects of his background. The teacher needs to provide a variety of experiences and activities, utilizing parents and other available resources that may reflect the student's background.

Conclusion

The word-decoding, vocabulary-building process taught through a multicultural approach guides the students and helps them meet their needs and overcome many of the impediments found in the traditional methods of word attack, which, for these LEP students, were confusing rather than helpful. By using a concrete, systematic, cumulative, spiral approach to word decoding for unlocking words not immediately recognized by the student, more time can be freed to develop and extend a functional vocabulary. This has proved to have a desirable result where tried. It was beneficial in building a meaningful, experiential background for the passages that students later enjoyed reading. The program was a functional and direct program that led to independence in reading earlier than it had been experienced previously. Linguistically sound in approach, the method does not require a knowledge of linguistic theory for its implementation.

It was found that a multicultural model can simplify the teaching of phoneme-grapheme correspondences by pointing out many newly considered relationships.

- Baecher, R. The educational cognitive styles of Hispanic-American students: a report. The educational scientist, Spring, 1976, 1 (2).
- _____. Focusing on the strengths of bilingual children, In L. Golubchick and B. Persky (Eds.) Innovations of education. Dubuque, Iowa: Allyn & Bacon, 1975.
- Biggins, C.M. Easy steps to reading independence, primary level, New York: Technique Learning Corp., 1975.
- _____. Easy steps to reading independence, secondary-developmental, New York: Technique Learning Corp., 1975.
- _____. More words and ideas, New York: Technique Learning Corp., 1975.
- Bloom, B.S. (Ed.). Taxonomy of educational objectives. New York: Longmans, Green, 1956.
- Chastain, K. Affective and ability factors in second language acquisition, Language learning, 1975, 25.
- Cocking, R.R. & C.E. Copple. Change through exposure to others: a study of children's verbalizations as they draw, In M.K. Poulsen & G.I. Lubin (Eds.) Piagetian theory and the helping professions, California: The University of South Carolina, 1979.
- Copeland, R. How children learn mathematics, (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan, 1974.
- Durkin, N.B. Reading instruction for today's children. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- Flesch, R.F. Why Johnny can't read. New York: Harper & Row, 1955.
- Faure, E., F. Herrera, A. Kaddoura, H. Lopez, A.V. Petrovsky, J. Rahnema, & F. C. Ward. Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow. Paris: UNESCO, 1972.
- Gans, R. Fact and fiction about phonics. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964.
- Guszask, F.J. A study of teacher solicitation and student response interaction about reading content in selected second, fourth, and sixth grades. An unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1966.
- Harris, A.J. (Ed.). Readings on reading instruction. New York: David McKay Co., 1972.

Heilman, A.W. Principles and practices of teaching reading.
New York: Merrill Co., 1963.

Kohl, H. Reading, how to, New York: Dutton, 1973.

Labov, W. The study of language in social context, Studium generale, 1970, 23, pp. 66089.

Stockwell L. & R. R. Rowen. Diagnosing and correcting reading disabilities. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1976.

Stauffer, R.G. The language-experience approach to the teaching of reading. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.